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STATE FOR SCA/CEN (SNELSIRE), SCA/PPD (BLOCKER), ECA

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SUBJECT: ARI ROLAND DUO RETURNS FOR EXUBERANT TURKMEN-AMERICAN PROGRAM

REFERENCE: A) ASHGABAT 565; B) ASHGABAT 466

SUMMARY

11. (U) Jazz musicians Ari Roland and Chris Byars helped post create an outstanding success in cultural diplomacy. After a suspenseful and challenging program in April, post was pleased to bring back Roland and Byars for a July jazz outreach program that broke cultural barriers, renewed old ties, and set the stage for post's first cultural program in the city of Balkanabat. Host government reaction was notably positive and helpful this time around -- with good media coverage of the program and more favorable coordination between the Ministry of Culture and provincial culture departments and governors' offices. The return of Roland and Byars allowed post a longer, richer program of cultural diplomacy that included cities not reached in the April program. Joint performances with local musicians and the incorporation of Turkmen music dramatically expanded the program's impact. Post enthusiastically thanks SCA/PPD and the Educational and Cultural Affairs Bureau for their support of this program and the Jazz at Lincoln Center program for its sound choice of musicians. END SUMMARY.

AN ELECTRIFYING ?HOMECOMING?

12. (U) Based on the public enthusiasm generated by the Ari Roland Quartet in April (reftel A), post invited half the Quartet back to work closely with Turkmen artists on joint concerts in celebration of U.S. Independence Day. Since the July program took place outside the school year, post did not make the difficult request to meet music students. The Ministry of Culture also denied post's request to have Roland and Byars meet with local state-employed musicians -- yet this did not reduce attendance at the evening concerts and day seminars with youth held in Ashgabat, Mary, Turkmenabat and Balkanabat.

13. (U) Following a performance of traditional jazz pieces at the official July 4 reception with two local musicians, Roland and Byars began rehearsals with five musicians nominated by the Ministry of Culture. In contrast with post's experience in April, the Ministry approved the July program in record time (one day), placed newspaper ads for all public performances in a timely manner, and solicited names from post of local musicians to work with the Duo. The local musicians -- three experienced musicians and two up-and-coming recent conservatory graduates -- proved their jazz credentials beyond post's hopes, allowing the group to quickly develop a mixed, U.S. and Turkmen musical repertoire for performance. The musicians played several traditional Turkmen and several jazz pieces using piano, string bass, saxophone, congo drums, traditional drums,

electric guitar, and voice.

14. (U) The group's first public performance, on July 6 in Ashgabat for an excited audience of about 500, was simply amazing. Not only had the U.S. musicians mastered very complex local rhythms but the group also emanated a cohesion and respect for one another that showed through in an electrifying performance of jazz. (NOTE: Following the Ashgabat performance, three of the five local musicians, with post financial support, toured with Roland and Byars for three regional performances -- the vocalist, keyboardist and drummer. END NOTE.)

MARY, TURKMENABAT: LOCAL OFFICIALS HELP WHERE THEY CAN

15. (U) In Mary, the site of previous difficulties with host government control of post's cultural events (reftel B) local officials were responsive and helpful on the day of the concert -- though as previously, Mary authorities denied public advertising of the concert through the American Corner. The local government ordered 400 state employees to attend the concert, which ironically helped the program reach a different audience -- local government bureaucrats. Theater staff started registering every person entering the theater including American Corner visitors -- but theater personnel ceased this activity upon Emboff's request, and after obtaining the blessing of the local governor's office. Embassy staff observed many traditionally-dressed older members of the crowd warm to the performance, eventually smiling, laughing and clapping at clever musical points and the mixing of Turkmen with American musical styles. Many audience members personally thanked Embassy staff and the musicians expressed their thanks for bringing the concert to Mary. Theater staff took the initiative to record the music and provided copies to the group. About 30 American Corner visitors attended the evening concert, having met the band at the Corner for a jazz workshop in the afternoon that drew about 35

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teenagers.

16. (U) In Turkmenabat on July 9, the Ari Roland ?Turkmen-American Quintet? continued to have a visibly positive impact on audiences, both at the afternoon American Corner seminar and concert. Local officials even guaranteed seats for the local American Corner's staff and visitors at the concert venue -- which almost filled to its 400-500 seat capacity. The officials visibly enjoyed the program, especially the jazz-styled Turkmen melodies which were quickly becoming the group's trademark songs. Again audience members directly expressed their appreciation of the program to embassy staff and the musicians.

MAIDEN VOYAGE TO BALKANABAT

17. (U) The July 11 concert in Balkanabat was post's first large-scale public event in the capital of Balkan region. The recent reopening of Balkan's Internet Access and Training Program (IATP) site assisted post considerably in advertising the event to local youth; about 40 secondary school youth and parents attended an afternoon workshop at the theater and stayed for the concert. In addition, Emboff visited two local bazaars in the afternoon before the show, handing out and posting fliers in Turkmen and Russian to shoppers and salespeople. Most requested the Turkmen language flier, and were initially skeptical that such a concert was truly free and open to the public. (NOTE: As the IATP site administrator later told Emboff, recent cultural events sponsored by other foreign embassies were either not publicly advertised or were not well enough advertised to appear open to all. END NOTE.)

18. (U) As in Mary and Turkmenabat, well-known local musicians attended the pre-concert sound check and workshop. However in contrast to the prior concerts, the workshop attendees became an integral part of the band for the evening performance, adding elements of traditional bakshi singing and gyjak (a three stringed guitar-like instrument) to the performance. The head of the National Cultural Center of Balkan region even suggested that Roland incorporate some explanatory comments about jazz and its history into the evening concert because he had found this additional information enriched the workshop. (NOTE: Helpful, independent

suggestions are rare from government officials. END NOTE.) For the concert, the quintet introduced the popular folk piece "Kush Depti," provoking gasps of recognition from the audience and tangible excitement that American musicians could play this well-known Turkmen piece. Encouraged by the turnout, post intends to more regularly program Balkanabat into cultural and educational outreach events, especially since the city is now home to a luxurious new 500-seat state theater where there had previously been no such venue.

SIGNIFICANT TV COVERAGE

¶9. (U) The various concerts received favorable TV coverage during evening news cultural segments. A longer feature on State TV4 also included extensive interview material with Roland, Byars and their local co-performers, as well as an interview with PAO emphasizing the benefits of cooperation, exchange, creativity, diversity and an improved U.S.-Turkmenistan relationship (septel).

ALBUM RELEASE?

¶10. (U) Post now hopes to further the program's impact by using the professional quality recordings from concerts in Mary and Balkanabat for publication of CDs for free distribution. The CDs will also be offered to key government contacts as an example of what can be achieved when Americans and Turkmen have the opportunity to work directly with one another. The Public Affairs Section is obtaining formal permission from the musicians for this publication and distribution.

COMMENT

¶11. (U) In Turkmenistan, persistence usually pays off -- as was clear during 2007 American Culture Days. The host government's desire to control as always hampered post's planning and outreach but also assisted by providing no-cost suitable venues in each city. In addition, the Government's notion in April that "Turkmens do not understand jazz," has firmly been put to rest.

¶12. (U) Public response was unabashedly positive -- particularly because the program showcased non-ethnic Turkmen traditions and ideas while paying respect to local traditions. Local musicians

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expressed gratitude for this brief opportunity for professional exchange and have asked for further such opportunities. Post hopes to expand on exchanges for local musicians and artists. Noting the significant and enthusiastic response to the joint Turkmen-American aspect of the program, post will seek to maximize the interactive nature of future cultural programming.

¶13. (U) Post also recognizes that the return of Roland and Byars, already familiar with Turkmenistan and familiar to audiences, provided additional impact. In a society with a heavy emphasis on relationships, the duo's return to Turkmenistan added to the warm "welcome back" approach from the public and official circles. As a result, post hopes to leverage -- when appropriate -- return trips for future program visitors. END COMMENT

¶14. (U) Dushanbe minimize considered.

HOAGLAND